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Large sports and recreation facilities in the tourism space of Łódź

Abstract. With the growing number of sports and other types of cultural events held in Łódź, there is a demand for new sports and recreational facilities, such as football stadiums and sports and entertainment halls. The aim of this article is to show the importance of the largest sports and recreational facilities located in the tourism space of Łódź. The analysis is mainly based on an inventory of stadiums and multi-purpose arenas in Łódź. In addition, the article provides a review of the literature related to sport tourism in cities, with emphasis on definitions of sport tourism and tourism space. Another category of information used by the author includes data compiled by institutions managing the facilities and bodies responsible for the organization of sports events in the city. The sport facilities of interest are also classified according to selected criteria. Finally, the discussion is supported by statistics about tourist traffic during sports and cultural events associated with the analysed sport and recreation facilities. The analysis indicates that the largest sports and recreation facilities play a role in the tourism space of Łódź but it is not as significant played by Piotrkowska Street or the Manufaktura shopping and service center.

Keywords: sports and recreation facility, sports tourism, Łódź, tourism space, sports events

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1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in tourist traffic associated with sport, which is reflected by the development of many forms of tourism activity, including sports tourism, especially in large cities. Although this phenomenon has existed for centuries, definitions of sports tourism has been formulated relatively recently, because research on this topic has only been conducted since the 1950s. In Łódź, following the rise in sports-related tourist traffic, several large sports and recreational facilities have been built in the last few years. The dynamic development of sport and recreation facilities in Łódź started at the beginning of the 21st century, when the first sport and recreation facilities with more capacity were built in response to the growing number of sports and cultural events that Łódź had the opportunity to host. Examples include the Atlas Arena, a multi-purpose sports hall, which was the venue for matches played during the 2014 Men's Volleyball World Championship, or the Widzew City Stadium, the venue for the 2019 U-20 World Cup, the biennial international men's youth football championship. It can be assumed that these facilities can, to some extent, play a role in the functioning of the tourism space in Łódź, mainly in connection with the organization of sports events, which attract many tourists.

The main aim of this article is to show what role the largest sports and recreation facilities in Łódź play in the tourism space of Łódź. In addition, the facilities of interest were classified according to various criteria such as the time of construction, transport accessibility and the distance to the biggest tourist attractions in Łódź, as well as the number of events organized in the period 2011-2019.

Included in the analysis were stadiums with a capacity of at least 10,000 seats and sports and multi-purpose arenas with at least 1,000 seats.

The study is mainly based on an inventory of selected facilities, which was supplemented by information collected from internet resources and promotional materials about the facilities published by their operators. Some results from a survey conducted by the author during the 2019 U-20 World Cup are also presented. That survey was conducted in the vicinity of the City Widzew Stadium among visitors who had arrived in Łódź due to watch the World Cup matches. The study begins with a review of the literature related to sports tourism in cities and definitions of sports tourism and tourism space.

2. Literature review

So far, many Polish and foreign researchers have dealt with topics related to urban sports tourism and sports and recreational facilities. With respect to the very

concept of sports tourism, it should be noted that although the phenomenon has existed centuries, it has not been researched until relatively recently. According to J. Zauhar (2003), its origins can be traced back to ancient Olympic Games. Currently, the definition of sports tourism is undergoing constant modifications. For the purposes of this study, however, the author has adopted the definition formulated by H. Gibson (1998, p. 156), where three categories of sports tourism are mentioned: “watching sporting events, visiting sports related attractions and active participation”. The role of sport and recreation facilities in the tourism space of selected towns is mentioned in the article by Faulkner et al. (2000), which shows the impact of organizing the 2000 Summer Olympics on tourist traffic in Sydney. According to A. Kowalczyk (2005), sport and recreation facilities that appear in cities drive the dynamic development of sport tourism, which is one of the main forms of broadly defined urban tourism. A. Hadzik (2010) analysed the sports infrastructure as an element of the tourism potential of cities. A few years later, J. Fourie and M. Santana-Gallego (2011) presented their study on the impact of organizing the 2004 European Men’s Football Championship on tourism in Portuguese cities. A. Królikowska-Tomczak (2011) used the case of Poznań to show that sport and recreation facilities, classified as tourist attractions, are elements of the strategy of reviving tourism in towns. J. Borzyszkowski (2012) described how the organization of the European Football Championship in 2012 influenced the tourism space of Warsaw, Gdańsk, Wrocław and Poznań. B. Rzegocińska-Tyżuk (2012) investigated how large sport and recreation facilities could be integrated into the general landscape of towns. J. Borzyszkowski (2014) analysed the so-called Barcelona effect, i.e. the impact of organizing the 1992 Summer Olympics on tourism in Barcelona. N. Piechota (2014) studied the development of the tourist function and the impact of sports events on urban tourism. K. Cieślowski and J. Kantyka (2014) presented sport and recreation facilities as significant entities in the development of business tourism in towns. E. Malchrowicz-Moško (2015) provided a broad view of the role of sport facilities in tourism space of towns, focusing on facilities built in connection with organizing winter or summer Olympic games. K. Cieślowski (2017) pointed out that sports facilities and events which are hosted in them can be considered new tourism products offered by cities.

Few researchers have dealt with similar issues with respect to Łódź. One of them is B. Włodarczyk (2016), who analysed the city’s record of hosting sports events. Another example is the study by B. Łuć (2020) on football fans who came to Łódź during the 2019 U-20 World Cup.

As regards the second key concept, namely tourism space, it has also undergone many changes recently. According to one of the first definitions, proposed by J. M. Miossec (1976), tourism space is a space located on the periphery of the permanent place of residence and the place of work, which generates tourist

traffic. The term is also defined as part of the geographical and socio-economic space, in which tourism phenomena occur (Warszyńska & Jackowski, 1978). However, in this article, the author uses a slightly different definition proposed by B. Włodarczyk (2009), who views tourism space as part of the geographical space in which tourism occurs.

The last key concept, namely a sports facility, can be defined as an independent and consolidated complex of field equipment and buildings intended for sports purposes (*Mała encyklopedia sportu*, 1987).

The above definitions highlight the connection between sports tourism and tourism space: both of them involve tourist movement in a given space. As elements of the tourism space of Łódź, the sports and recreation facilities reviewed in the study play their role mainly as venues of sporting and cultural events, which attract tourists as part of sports tourism and in this way contribute to the city's tourism space.

3. General characteristics of the largest sports and recreation facilities in Łódź

The largest sports and recreation facilities in the area of Łódź have been built over the last two decades. Five of the six facilities analyzed in this study have been constructed in the 21st century. Only the MOSiR Hall, known as the Sports Palace, was completed in 1957 (Table 1).

Table 1. The largest sport and recreation facilities (as at 2020)

| Facility | Location (districts of Łódź) | Year of construction | Capacity (number of seats) | Used by sport clubs |
|---------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Widzew City Stadium | Widzew | 2017 | 18 018 | Widzew Łódź (football) |
| Moto Arena | Polesie | 2018 | 10 350 | Orzeł Łódź (speedway) |
| Municipal Stadium | Polesie | 2015 (currently under reconstruction) | 5 700 | ŁKS Łódź (football) |
| Atlas Arena | Polesie | 2009 | 13 806 | none |
| MOSiR Hall | Polesie | 1957 | 9 010 | none |
| Sport Arena | Polesie | 2018 | 3 017 | ŁKS Commercecon Łódź, Grot Budowlani Łódź (women's volleyball) |

Source: based on information from Stadiony.net (2021) and Miejska Arena Kultury i Sportu (2021).

Most of the analysed facilities are located in the Polesie district, with the Municipal Stadium, Atlas Arena and Sport Arena, dedicated to Józef "Ziuna" Żyliński¹, all located next to each other in the area owned by Łódź MOSiR (The Municipal Centre of Sports and Recreation). All of these facilities, except for the MOSiR Hall, are managed by the organizational unit of the Municipal Arena of Culture and Sport, established in 2015.

As for the stadiums, the Widzew City Stadium is the most famous landmark of Łódź. It was built on the site of an old stadium, knocked down in 2015. The new facility was officially opened in March 2017 and is home to the Widzew Łódź football club. So far, the largest event hosted there was the 2019 U-20 Men>s Football World Championship. The stadium is also equipped with rooms that can be used to hold conferences and business meetings.

Another facility is the Moto Arena speedway stadium, which is used by the Orzeł Łódź Speedway Club. Opened in July 2018, it is one of the youngest sports and recreation facilities in Łódź.

The Municipal Stadium is the smallest of the three stadiums. It is currently being expanded, but it is used to host matches played by the ŁKS Łódź football team. The facility was built on the site of a pre-war stadium that was demolished a few years ago. The renovated stadium will accommodate about 20,000 spectators.

In the category of entertainment and multi-purpose arena, the Atlas Arena is the biggest one. The facility was opened in 2009 and has already hosted a number of sports and cultural events. Currently, it is the third largest sports and entertainment hall in Poland, behind Krakow's Tauron Arena and the Arena Gliwice hall. It was the venue of Women's European Volleyball Championship in 2009 and 2019, the 2009 European Men's Basketball Championship and 2014 Men>s Volleyball World Championship. Thanks to its infrastructure, the Atlas Arena can be used to hold music concerts and various types of fairs, exhibitions and conferences.

Though slightly smaller, the MOSiR hall was the largest and most representative sports and entertainment hall in Łódź until the construction of the Atlas Arena. In recent years, it has lost some of its former importance and popularity. Nowadays it is mainly used to host games of lower sports leagues as well as youth games. It used to be the venue for matches of the volleyball team in men's volleyball championships or matches of the Skra Bełchatów volleyball team.

The smallest and the youngest of the multi-purpose arenas is the Sport Arena, which was built in 2018 in the immediate vicinity of the Atlas Arena. It was built for the women's volleyball teams of ŁKS Commercecon Łódź and Grot Budowlani Łódź.

¹ Józef Żyliński (d. 2014) was a Polish basketball player and coach, associated with the ŁKS Łódź sports club.

All of the facilities described above can be used as venues for many sports and cultural events. They can also accommodate different kind of conferences and business meetings. As a result, they constitute an important element of the tourism space of Łódź.

4. The role of the largest sports and recreation facilities in the tourism space of Łódź

The sports and recreation facilities described above, and in particular their functioning, play a role in the tourism space of Łódź, in connection with the organization of cultural and sports events, which have become much more numerous in recent years.

The most important aspect related to the functioning of these facilities in the tourism space of Łódź is their location and transport accessibility. All of them are located approximately 3-4 km from the centre of Łódź (Fig. 1). As a result of the dynamic expansion of the network of motorways and expressways, they are relatively close to the A1/A2 motorway junction, or other supra-regional routes, such as the S8 and S14 expressways, which are constantly being expanded.

Another important fact is that Atlas Arena, Sport Arena and the Widzew City Stadium are located in the immediate vicinity of the Łódź Kaliska train and bus station, one of the largest stations in the city. In addition, there are a number of hotels in the vicinity of these facilities, including 4-star hotels (Double Tree By Hilton and Holiday Inn). Another attraction located nearby is one of the largest and most famous green areas in Łódź – Józef Piłsudski Park, commonly known as the Health Park.

The location of the MOSiR hall slightly less convenient as regards access to the expressways, but it is a walking distance away from the 4-star Holiday Inn hotel and the Central Museum of Textiles.

The Widzew City Stadium is relatively the furthest away from the city centre. It is also a further distance away from hotels or expressways. However, it is close to the Herbst Palace, which is part of the Museum of Art, and not far from the former factory estate Księży Młyn.

As already mentioned, in recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of sports and cultural events held in Łódź. As regards the infrastructure of the stadiums, the Widzew City Stadium has the biggest potential in this respect (Table 2). Like the Municipal Stadium, it was primarily designed to host football matches. Sometimes, however, it is used as a venue for competitions in other disciplines, such as rugby. In contrast, Moto Arena, which was specifically designed for speedway races, does not lend itself to hosting other disciplines. However, all

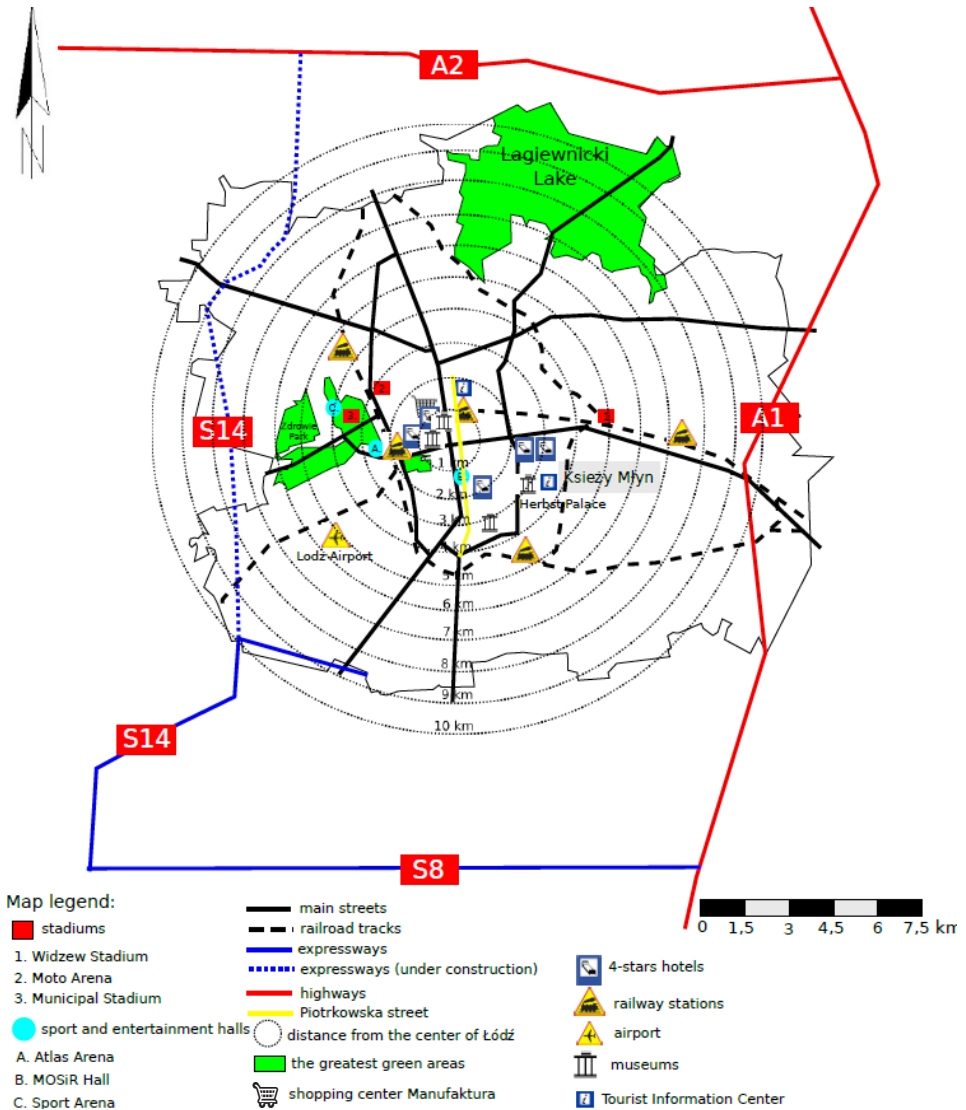


Fig. 1. Location of the largest sport facilities in tourism space of Łódź

Source: based on Łódzka Organizacja Turystyczna (2021), Miejska Arena Kultury i Sportu (2021) and Google Maps (2021).

the three stadiums have the necessary infrastructure to organize music concerts and all kinds of cultural events as well as conferences and business meetings. All of them are also open to the public, with the exception is the Municipal Stadium, which is currently undergoing expansion.

Table 2. Hosting possibilities of the largest stadiums in Łódź

| Stadium | Football matches | Athletic competitions and other sports events | Music concerts and other cultural events | Sightseeing tours |
|---------------------|------------------|---|--|-------------------|
| Widzew City Stadium | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| Municipal Stadium | yes | yes | yes | no (temporarily) |
| Moro Arena | no | yes | yes | yes |

Source: based on Stadiony.net (2021) and Miejska Arena Kultury i Sportu (2021).

Like the stadiums, the largest multi-purpose arena in Łódź can host sports events and all kinds of cultural events. In addition, each of them is equipped with conference and business rooms (Table 3). While the MOSiR hall does not have typical conference rooms, various types of conferences and fairs can be held in the central space. Atlas Arena additionally features a running track, which can be used for athletics competitions. Each of the facilities can be visited by tourists.

Because the three stadiums in Łódź are still relatively new, the number of events hosted so far is small compared to stadiums in other Polish cities. Of the three, The Widzew City Stadium has hosted the most events so far: about 70 sporting events and about 40 other types of events since its opening in 2017. By far the fewest events have taken place at Moto Arena (Table 4). In terms of the average annual number of events, the Widzew Stadium also tops the list. This is probably because in contrast to the other two stadiums, in addition to league matches, it hosts other regular events, e.g. matches of the Polish men's youth national football team or rugby matches.

Of all the entertainment and multi-purpose arenas in Łódź, the Atlas Arena is definitely the most utilised facility, with a total of about 600 events organized

Table 3. Hosting possibilities of the largest sport and entertainment multi-purpose arenas in Łódź

| Hall | The number of sports disciplines that can be accommodated | Music concerts and other cultural events | Sightseeing tours |
|-------------|---|--|-------------------|
| Atlas Arena | ~10 (e.g. athletics and ice hockey) | yes | yes |
| MOSiR Hall | ~10 (e.g. athletics and figure skating) | yes | yes |
| Sport Arena | ~7 (volleyball, handball, basketball) | yes | yes |

Source: based on Miejska Arena Kultury i Sportu (2021)/ and Miejski Ośrodek Sportu i Rekreacji w Łodzi (2021).

Table 4. Events organized in the largest sports and entertainment facilities in Łódź in 2011-2019

| Facility | Number of sport events | Number of other events | Number of business rooms | Number of seats in business rooms | Average annual number of events |
|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Widzew City Stadium | ~70 | ~40 | 2 | ~900 | ~37 |
| Municipal Stadium | ~70 | ~20 | 3 | ~80 | ~18 |
| Moto Arena | ~20 | no data | 3 | ~80 | ~14 |
| Atlas Arena | ~300 | ~300 | 15 | 530 | ~67 |
| MOSiR Hall | ~200 | ~200 | none (but conferences and business meetings can be organized in the central space of the hall) | ~8700 | ~45 |
| Sport Arena | ~50 | ~100 | 2 | 80 | ~75 |

Source: based on Miejska Arena Kultury i Sportu (2021) and Miejski Ośrodek Sportu i Rekreacji w Łodzi (2021).

so far, mainly thanks to its large capacity and the modern infrastructure. It also boasts the largest number of business rooms and available seats in these rooms. The capacity of the other two multi-purpose arenas are much lower. So far, the fewest events have taken place in the Sport Arena, which has been in use for only three years. However, it leads the ranking in terms of the average annual number of organized events thanks to regularly played matches of two women's volleyball teams representing two clubs: ŁKS Commercecon Łódź and Grot Budowlani Łódź. The MOSiR hall is at the bottom of this ranking with an average of only 45 events per year.

The most important metric associated with the organization of events is, of course, visitor attendance. According to this criterion, the Widzew City Stadium leads the ranking (Table 5), which is not surprising given the fact it has the biggest capacity of all the facilities. A more reliable indicator is average capacity utilization, which is the highest for the Widzew City Stadium and the Municipal Stadium, and the lowest for the Moto Arena stadium.

As regards attendance figures during sports and other cultural events held in the city's largest sports and multi-purpose arenas, they are by far the highest for the Atlas Arena. However, in terms of average capacity utilization, the Sport Arena tops the list, thanks to the fairly high attendance at volleyball matches played by the two women's teams.

Table 5. Average attendance during events organized in the largest sport and entertainment facilities in Łódź in the period 2011-2019

| Facility | Average attendance during sport events (in thousands) | Average attendance during other events (in thousands) | Average capacity utilization (percentage) |
|---------------------|---|---|---|
| Widzew City Stadium | ~16 | ~16 | ~90 |
| Moto Arena | ~4 | no data | ~50 |
| Municipal Stadium | ~4,5 | ~7 | ~80 |
| Atlas Arena | ~5 | ~10 | ~60 |
| MOSiR Hall | ~2 | ~5 | ~40 |
| Sport Arena | ~2 | ~4 | ~95 |

Source: own study based on Stadiony.net (2021), Miejska Arena Kultury i Sportu (2021) and Miejski Ośrodek Sportu i Rekreacji w Łodzi (2021).

The six sports and recreation facilities are also viewed as the city's tourist attractions. They have become important assets used in the promotion of the city's tourism offering. For example, the *lodz.travel* website features them as places worth visiting. They are also found on various tourist maps of the city and in other promotional brochures. Information about them is widely available in the city space. In many parts of Łódź, there are signs and information boards that provide directions to these facilities.

Interest in the city's largest sports and recreational facilities can also be observed in the Internet, for example using Google Trends.

As shown in Fig. 2, the Widzew City Stadium has generated the greatest interest among internet users in the reference period. A particularly high number of Google searches was recorded in mid-2019, which is most likely related with the U-20 World Men's Football Championship, which was held at the turn of May and June. Later on, the stadium's popularity has decreased. In comparison, the Municipal Stadium is much less popular, according to Google Trends. The number of searches associated with the Moto Arena, has been negligible throughout the entire reference period.

A corresponding analysis conducted for the sports and **multi-purpose** arenas reveals that the Atlas Arena has generated the greatest interest among Internet users (Fig. 3), with the highest number of searches recorded before the outbreak of the pandemic. Later on, when events in Atlas Arena stopped taking place from March 2020, interest in the facility has dropped. The number of Google searches for the MOSiR hall and the Sport Arena throughout the reference period was comparatively small.

Another important indicator that describes the role of large sport and recreation facilities in the tourism space of Łódź is the volume of tourist traffic they

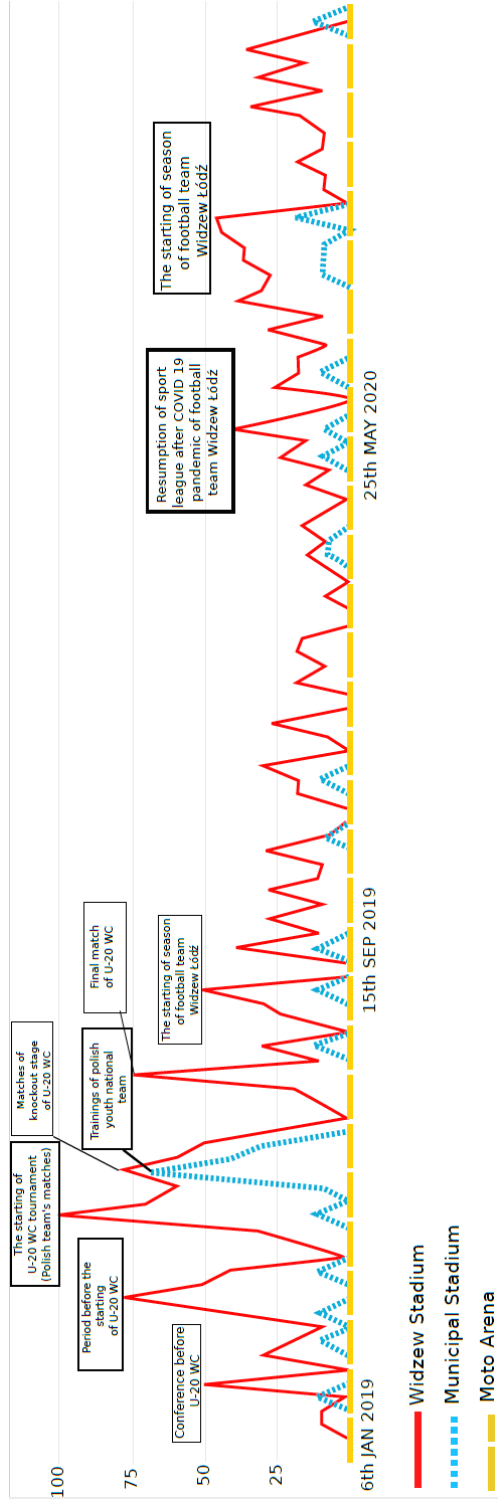


Fig. 2. The number of Google searches related to the largest stadiums in Łódź in the period 2019-2020
 Source: based on Google Trends (2021).

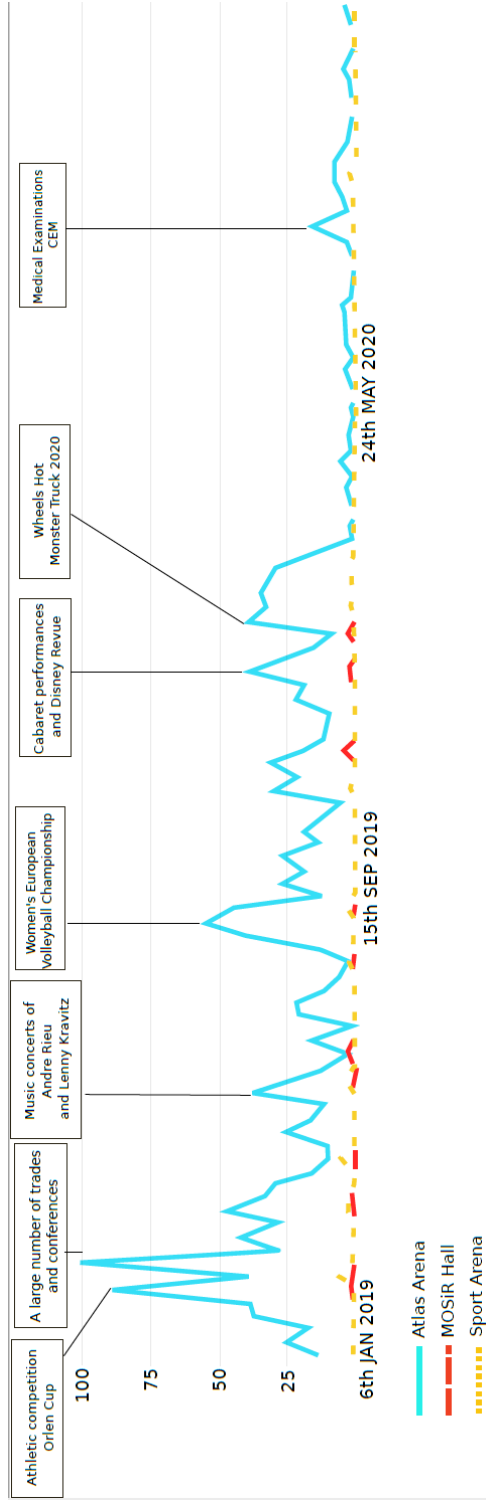


Fig. 3. The number of Google searches related to the largest sports and entertainment multi-purpose arenas in Łódź in the period 2019-2020

Source: based on Google Trends (2021).

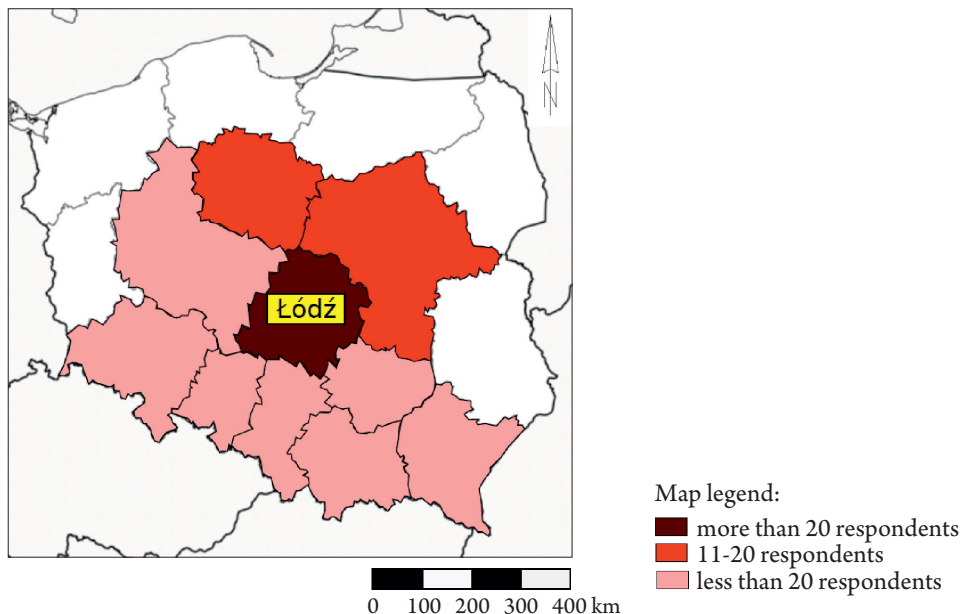


Fig. 4. Number of respondents by province of permanent residence

Source: Łuć (2020).

generate. Peaks in tourist traffic can be observed during various kinds of events, such as European Men's Basketball Championship and European Women's Volleyball Championship organized in 2009 shortly after the Atlas Arena was opened. Almost 30% foreign tourists surveyed in a study of tourist traffic in Łódź and the province had come to participate in these events (Tanaś, 2010). As a result, the Atlas Arena was awarded the title of the Sport Facility of the Year 2009.

Another example of an event that attracted a lot of tourists was the 2014 World Men's Volleyball Championship. A survey conducted during the tournament indicates that the majority of respondents were inhabitants of Łódź and the rest of the province (35%) and two neighbouring provinces (35%) (Włodarczyk, 2016). The majority of surveyed respondents spent only one day and in Łódź and did not use any accommodation services.

One example of a more recent significant event was the 2019 U-20 Men's Football World Championship hosted in the Widzew City Stadium. A survey conducted during that tournament revealed that more than 60% of the respondents were from Poland. The largest percentage of foreign respondents were from South Korea and New Zealand, which were represented by their national teams (Łuć, 2020).

Like in the case of the 2014 Volleyball Championship, most respondents were from Łódzkie province and from two neighbouring provinces (Fig. 4). Interestingly, more than 70% of respondents arrived in Łódź only for a few hours, and can be classified as one day visitors.

5. Conclusion

The analysis presented in the article indicates that the largest sports and recreation facilities in Łódź are tourist attractions, which offer a particular type of a tourist product and are an important element of the city's tourism space. Thanks to their infrastructure and equipment they can accommodate various kinds of sporting and cultural events. All the facilities analysed in the study are marked on many maps and tourist brochures, which means that they are treated as the city's tourist attractions. All of these facilities generate tourist traffic related to sport tourism, business tourism and event tourism. To a certain extent, this is confirmed by the statistics presented in the article. However, these facilities are not as important or as popular as, for example, Piotrkowska Street, one of Europe's longest commercial thoroughfares or the Manufaktura, an arts centre, shopping mall, and leisure complex. The analysed facilities are relatively new elements of the city's tourism space. The Atlas Arena plays the most important role as a venue for many national and international sports and cultural events. The Widzew City Stadium has also played an increasingly important role in recent years. Such facilities create opportunities not only for the development of the city's tourism space but also for its general development. As venues for sports and cultural events, they can become an important element of the city's strategy of promoting tourism and increasing tourist traffic associated with urban tourism, in particular sports, business or event tourism.

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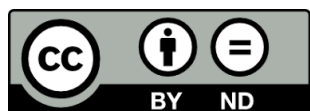
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Duże obiekty sportowo-rekreacyjne w przestrzeni turystycznej Łodzi

Streszczenie. Systematyczny wzrost liczby wydarzeń sportowych i kulturalnych w Łodzi przyczynia się do budowy obiektów sportowo-rekreacyjnych. Są to zarówno stadiony piłkarskie, jak i hale widowiskowo-sportowe. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest pokazanie znaczenia największych łódzkich obiektów sportowo-rekreacyjnych w łódzkiej przestrzeni turystycznej. Główną metodę badawczą stanowiła inwentaryzacja największych łódzkich stadionów i hal widowiskowo-sportowych. Ponadto przeprowadzono kwerendę literatury związanej z turystyką sportową w miastach, jak również z samym pojęciem turystyki sportowej i przestrzeni turystycznej. Zaprezentowano także dane opracowane przez instytucje zarządzające obiektami i organy odpowiedzialne za organizację sportu w mieście. Dokonano klasyfikacji obiektów według wybranych kryteriów. Ponadto przedstawiono dane związane z ruchem turystycznym w trakcie wydarzeń sportowych i kulturowych organizowanych w analizowanych obiektach sportowo-rekreacyjnych. Przeprowadzona analiza wykazała, że największe obiekty sportowo-rekreacyjne wpływają na przestrzeń turystyczną Łodzi, ale nie oddziałują na nią w tak dużym stopniu jak ulica Piotrkowska czy centrum handlowo-usługowe Manufaktura.

Słowa kluczowe: obiekt sportowo-rekreacyjny, turystyka sportowa, Łódź, przestrzeń turystyczna, wydarzenia sportowe



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